

Promoting College Table Tennis

By John McInerney

With the half-way point in the 2006-2007 NCTTA season rapidly approaching, college table tennis programs around the country are gearing-up for a mid-season shootout while preparing for next semester's action, both home and away.

Like any other developmental athletic program, college table tennis is a work in progress at most universities across the nation.

The application process for starting a college club, like any course of study, requires nothing more than self-discipline, diligence, and hard work. Some students shun away from the idea of developing a club once they come to realize the number of steps involved in creating a club, but not all of them. A club constitution needs to be drafted, a faculty advisor must be selected, and 12 or more first-time members must be committed to the club's development prior to being established. But the real key to the success of any competitive college club is marketing. Not only is marketing the key to success in college table tennis, it is essential to further developing the entire sport, both domestically and abroad.

Just last semester the University of Central Florida stocked six-packs of table tennis balls in their bookstore with their logo stamped on each one ... and the balls sold like news stories hot off the press.

Rockstar Games, who sponsored and attended the 2006 NCTTA National Championships in Dallas, TX, admitted they were quite fond of the sport. The game developers talked about the endless hours spent playing in the studio on their very own table! Leaving no detail unaccounted for, Rockstar developed characters completely decked out from head to toe in manufacturer's logos such as Nittaku, Yasaka, Joola, and Adidas. And we're not just talking shirts and shorts, characters show off every aspect of their corporate affiliations, all the way down to the wristbands and edge tape. You can find out more about the game at:

www.rockstargames.com/tabletennis

What's incredibly opportunistic about college table tennis is that almost all college students possess a strong interest in the sport. Table tennis is widely popular amongst this age group. When asked if they knew of the rising popularity of intercollegiate competition around the country, most students replied with a look of astonishment, wanting to know more. It is then that they come to realize the realm of complex diversity that is the sport of table tennis, and the many different aspects which comprise our sport today – not to mention the seemingly overwhelming decision of selecting an appropriate equipment combination.

College players are the future of our sport. The players you love to follow on TV and in print are playing right now for college teams across all corners of America. With young talent such as Whitney Ping, Jackie Lee, Mark Hazinski, Han Xiao and Adam Hugh – the future is now. New marketing techniques are being developed right now, and it is the children of the baby boomers that will be responsible for utilizing these new methods of advertising. In an age where technology seems to dominate our culture, it is amazing to think of what might possibly be next – and how technology will continue to impact, and even evolve, the next generation.

The increasingly popular **Myspace.com** has ensued tens of thousands of small interest groups online. Of these are dozens of table tennis groups. Users can join a group, discuss topics with one another, and even explore playing opportunities in their region. *Myspace* brings an interesting new aspect to the sport of table tennis, because it is just one of the many new vehicles being utilized for promoting the sport today. The target market here is up-and-coming athletes, casual players, and fans of the sport.

Facebook.com is yet another user-friendly, interactive website. Created by college students, *facebook* is an online community for students to connect on various levels of similar interests. It has provided students with the opportunity to get to know the sport itself a little bit better, with focus groups that concentrate on discussing table tennis related topics.

The next generation of table tennis players promises to be increasingly inventive, because the ever-changing world that we live in today demands that of them. The formative environment in which college players have learned the game requires a multitude of resources for continuing the game's progress, and ensuring its future. Not only have these students already begun to tackle the existing opportunities presented to them, they are creating new ones to meet the demands of a right-here, right-now information-ready world.

If you are still stumped, or want to find out more about how you or someone you know can get involved, contact the NCTTA at **info@nctta.org** for more information.